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Impact of Rankings on Higher Education - International and German Perspectives

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Impact of Rankings on Higher Education: International and German Perspectives

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November 2007
'The University itself is ranked among the top UK universities for the quality of its teaching'

'[Ireland] should aim to have two universities in the top 20 worldwide by 2013’

‘You should hold a degree from a Times top 100 university ranked at no 33 or higher’

League Tables are ‘dangerous, often ill-informed but difficult to influence and most definitely here to stay!’
Themes

1. Impact on HEIs: View of Institutional Leaders

2. Other Experiences, Actions and Reactions

3. Implications for Institutions and Higher Education
1. Impact on HEIs: View of Institutional Leaders
Difficulties with League Tables

- Technical and Methodological Difficulties
  - Indicators as proxies for quality?
  - Quality and appropriateness of the metrics

- Usefulness of the results as ‘consumer’ information
  - Rater bias? Halo effect? Reputational ranking?
  - Quality and appropriateness of the information

- Comparability of complex institutions
  - One-size-fits-all? Diversity of missions, complex organisations
  - Matthew effect?

- Influences on institutional decision-making and academic behaviour
  - Helping set strategic goals or encouraging HEIs to become what is measured?
Respondent Profile

International (N=202)

- **Age:**
  - 36% post 1970
  - 24% 1945-1969
  - 40% pre 1945
- **83% publicly funded**
- **Institutional type**
  - 30% teaching intensive
  - 19% research informed
  - 29% research intensive

Germany (N=49)

- **Age:**
  - 47% post 1970
  - 13% 1945-1969
  - 40% pre 1945
- **89% publicly funded**
- **Institutional type**
  - 39% teaching intensive
  - 9% research informed
  - 22% research intensive
Purpose of Ranking

International

- Provide comparative information = <70%
- Target Audience:
  - Students = 54%
  - Public Opinion = 23%
- Users:
  - Students = 50%
  - Public Opinion = 12%
  - Government = 11%
  - Parents = 10%
  - Funding Agencies = 3%

Germany

- Provide comparative information = 70%
- Target Audience:
  - Students = 66%
  - Public Opinion = 18%
- Users:
  - Students = 62%
  - Government = 14%
  - Public Opinion = 8%
  - Parents = 5%
  - Funding Agencies = 2.7%
Ranking Status

International
- 58% not happy with current rank
  - 93% want to improve national rank;
  - 82% want to improve int’l rank
- 70% desire to be top 10% nationally
- 71% desire to be top 25% internationally

Germany
- 46% not happy with current rank
  - 94% want to improve national rank;
  - 79% want to improve int’l rank
- 70% desire to be top 10% nationally
- 60% desire to be top 25% internationally
Maintaining Position and Reputation

- Rankings play a critical role in enabling/facilitating HEIs to maintain and build institutional position and reputation.

- While answers dependent upon ‘happiness with position’,
  - Almost 50% Int’l/50% German HEIs use their institutional position for publicity purposes: press releases, official presentations, website.

- 56% Int’l/53% German HEIs have formal internal mechanism for reviewing their position:
  - 56% Int’l/56% German: Vice Chancellor, President or Rector
  - 14% Int’l/6% German: Governing Authority
Help or Hinder?

International

- **HELP**
  - Institut’l Reputation 68%
  - Marketing/Publicity 65%
  - Student Recruitment 63%

- **HINDER**
  - Marketing 15%
  - Institut’l Reputation 14%
  - Student Recruitment 14%
  - Faculty Morale 12%
  - Faculty Recruitment 9%
  - Academic Partnerships 8%
  - Int’l Collaboration 6%

Germany

- **HELP**
  - Marketing/Publicity 81%
  - Student Recruitment 74%
  - Institut’l Reputation 67%

- **HINDER**
  - Academic Partnerships 7%
  - Institut’l Reputation 7%
  - Int’l Collaboration 7%
  - Faculty Recruitment 7%
  - Student Recruitment 7%
  - Faculty Morale 7%
  - Marketing 4%
Peer Benchmarking

International

- ~40% consider an HEIs rank before discussions:
  - Int’l Collaboration
  - Academic Programmes
  - Research
  - Student Exchanges
- 57% think LTRS influencing others partnering with them
- 34% think LTRS influencing membership of academic/professional bodies

Germany

- Over 39% consider an HEIs rank before discussions:
  - Int’l collaboration
  - Academic Programmes
  - Student Exchanges
  - Research/Nat’l Collaboration
- 60% think LTRS influencing others partnering with them
- 27% think LTRS influencing membership of academic/professional bodies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefactor</strong></td>
<td>‘Depends on the rank’&lt;br&gt;‘They feel reassured supporting us’&lt;br&gt;‘Provides international comparators’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborators</strong></td>
<td>‘Depends on the rank’&lt;br&gt;‘Good for reputation’&lt;br&gt;‘We feel an improvement’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Current Faculty</strong></td>
<td>‘Increases awareness about the importance of publishing’&lt;br&gt;‘Easier to induce improvement with the department head whose rankings are declining’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employers</strong></td>
<td>‘They feel reassured’&lt;br&gt;‘Those not open to us become more receptive’&lt;br&gt;‘Can be confusing’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding Agencies</strong></td>
<td>‘Impact on small part of indicators’&lt;br&gt;‘Have less pretexts to deny funding’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future Faculty</strong></td>
<td>‘Recruitment easier with good reputation’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government</strong></td>
<td>‘May believe simplistic picture’&lt;br&gt;‘Local government included to spend additional money for an excellent university’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry</strong></td>
<td>‘Depends on the rank: good for reputation vs. less interest’</td>
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<td><strong>Parents</strong></td>
<td>‘Particularly in an international market where status and prestige are considered in decision-making’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Partnerships</strong></td>
<td>‘Good for reputation at international level’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td>‘High profile students apply to high profile universities’&lt;br&gt;‘Influence at the margins’</td>
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</table>
63% Int’l/67% German respondents have taken strategic, organisational, managerial or academic actions in response to the results.

Of those,

- Overwhelming majority took either strategic or academic decisions and actions
- Only 8% Int’l/14% German respondents indicated they had taken no action
## Actions Arising (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
<td>- 'Indicators underlying rankings are explicit part of target agreements between rector and faculties’&lt;br&gt;- 'Have become part of a SWOT analysis&lt;br&gt;- 'Organise benchmarking exercises’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation</strong></td>
<td>- 'New section established to deal with indicator improvements and monitor rankings’&lt;br&gt;- 'Reorganisation of structure’&lt;br&gt;- 'Have organised investigation team’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Management</strong></td>
<td>- 'Rector enforces the serious and precise processing of ranking as well as control of the relevant indicators’&lt;br&gt;- 'Development of better management tools’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic</strong></td>
<td>- 'Improve teaching and learning’&lt;br&gt;- 'New academic programmes’&lt;br&gt;- 'Increase English language programmes’&lt;br&gt;- 'More scholarships and staff appointments’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparative Observations

International

- Happy with LTRS: 42% satisfied/58% unsatisfied
- LTRS Helpful: 65% w/ Marketing/Publicity; 63% Student Recruitment
- 69% believe most positive impact on students
- 19% believe most negative impact on parents
- 26% believe HEI classification most influential policy impact
- Greatest impact to ‘favour established universities’
- 95% think Teaching Quality should be included

Germany

- Happy with LTRS: 54% satisfied/46% unsatisfied
- LTRS Helpful: 81% w/ Marketing/Publicity; 74% Student Recruitment
- 76% believe most positive impact on students
- 16% believe most negative impact on current faculty
- 30% believe HEI classification most influential policy impact
- Greatest impact to ‘establish hierarchy’ of HEIs
- 94% think Teaching Quality should be included
Ideal ‘League Tables’

- **Purpose?**
  - Give fair and unbiased picture of strengths and weaknesses
  - Provide student choice for a programme and institution
  - Provide accountability and enhance quality

- **Ideal Metrics?**
  - Teaching quality
  - Employment
  - Student-staff ratio
  - Research, e.g. publications and income

- **Who should develop?**
  - German respondents: Ind. Research Org, NGO, Accreditation Agency, HEI

- **Unit of Analysis?**
  - 41% institutional, 29% programme, 30% departmental level
3. Other Experiences, Actions and Reactions
Evidence is limited, but trends appearing

- High rankings $\rightarrow$ rise in applications (*NY Times*, 2007)
- Rank important for US high-ability students (Griffith/Rask, 2007)
- UK, Germany and New Zealand (Clarke, 2007; Federkeil, 2002)
- Ranking important for international recruitment/mobile postgraduate market (EAIE)
Impact on Stakeholders

- **US Governing Boards** (Levin, 2002)
  - 75% pay attention to US N&WR
  - 68% Boards discuss rankings; 71% for half an hour or more.

- **UK Employers** favour graduates from more highly ranked HEIs (University of Sussex, 2006)

- **State appropriations per student in public colleges** are responsive to rankings (US) (Zhe Jin, 2007)

- **Almost all universities** chosen for Deutsche Telekom professorial chairs used rankings as evidence of research performance (Spiewak, 2005)
US HEI Views

Importance of Rankings:

- 76% somewhat or very important
- 51% attempted to improve their rankings
- 50% used rankings as internal benchmarks
- 35% announced results in press releases or on the web
- 4% established task force or committee to address rankings
- 20% ignored them

(Levin, 2002, p14)
US Institutional (re)Action

- University administrators: ‘most engaged and obsessively implicated’ (Keller, 2007)
- Recruit students who will be ‘assets’ in terms of maintaining and enhancing rank (Clarke, 2007)
- HEIs making extensive investments to influence ‘student input’ metric (Brewer et al, 2002)
  - 88% identified retention rates;
  - 84% alumni-giving;
  - 75% graduation rates;
  - 71% entry scores;
  - 63% faculty compensation;
  - 31% student-faculty ratio.
- 25% improve educational expenditure
- 7% improve research capacity (Levin, 2002)
3. Implications for Institutions and Higher Education
Observations (1)

- Rankings and League Tables have gained popularity because they (appear to) fulfil particular purposes and needs.
- Accordingly, ‘concerns’ were easily ignored/shrugged off with reference to individual institution’s score or broader objectives (e.g. benchmarking, strategic planning).
- International/German experience replicated by/through literature and earlier US study.
- Increasing evidence suggests wider usage, impact, and influence.
Observations (2)

- Strong perception that benefits/advantages flow from high ranking
- Influence goes beyond ‘traditional’ student audience
  - Growing influence on public opinion, government and funders
  - Influence policymaking, e.g. classification of institutions, funding and accreditation
- HEIs taking results very seriously, and making changes
  - Embedding league tables within strategic decision-making
  - Making structural and organisational changes; shifting resources
  - Institutions behaving rationally – becoming what is measured
- Governments using Rankings as Policy Instrument/HEIs using Rankings as Management Tool
Implications (1)

- Enhancing Accountability and Transparency
  - Rankings taking on QA function but with *own* definition of quality
  - Worldwide comparisons more significant in the future

- Increasing vertical stratification w/ growing gap between elite and mass education
  - Greater demand for ‘elite’ HEIs and ‘devaluing of others’
  - Public HEIs have hard time competing; what is the cost of repositioning an HEI?
  - Greater ‘mission’ convergence and undervaluing of institutional diversity
  - Despite support for inter-institutional collaboration, in a competitive environment, ‘elite’ institutions may see little benefit working with/helping ‘lesser’ institutions.
Implications (2)

- Re-structuring HE systems, nationally and internationally
  - Enhance Market Mechanisms and Global Competition
  - ‘Development of single world market’
  - Geo-political implications for developed and developing economies/societies
- Pace of HR reform likely to quicken as governments believe reform will lead to more competitive and better (more highly ranked) HEIs
- Need for an appropriate public policy role in the development and distribution of rankings is critical
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